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Senate

NOMINATION OF GOVERNOR RIDGE

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, apparently within the next 24 hours we will have the opportunity to vote on the President's nominee to head our new Department of Homeland Security. The President has made an excellent choice. It is hard for me to imagine a better choice to undertake this responsibility than Governor Ridge.

Twenty years ago this month, Governor Ridge and I stood with about 80 other freshmen Congressmen and women at the other end of this building and raised our right hand and took an oath of office to defend our Constitution and country. He and I then served together in the House for the next 10 years and actually helped to lead one of the Banking Committee subcommittees as ranking Democrat and Republican.

Later we served as Governors in the neighboring States of Pennsylvania and Delaware. Even before we came to Washington, we served in the Armed Forces of our country where he

served with real distinction in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam war.

I will always be especially grateful for a breakfast Governor Ridge came to almost 20 years ago. I had just been elected the at large Congressman from Delaware and ended the campaign with a little bit of debt. We decided to have a fundraising breakfast to help take care of the debt, and Senator Biden, then the junior Senator from Delaware, was good enough to come and speak at our breakfast. We had a whole host of Democratic colleagues from the House, new freshmen who wanted to show their support for their new colleague. One Republican stopped by that breakfast, and it was the freshman Congressman from Erie, PA.

I will always be grateful for that appearance and for the friendship that has spanned some 20 years. I will be pleased to vote with my colleagues and join, I suspect all of them, in making him a unanimous choice for Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security.

While I believe Governor Ridge is more than qualified for the job, the

task he faces is daunting. Congress has given him a Department that at least on paper should be able to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks more effectively than Federal Government and State governments can today. We have authorized the transfers of literally dozens of agencies and tens of thousands of workers. We have outlined a skeleton organization that should be able to pull together under one roof information on threats and vulnerabilities and to use that information to improve security and better prepare our first responders.

Very little of what we have outlined, though, will be in place on day 1, and day 1 is tomorrow for all intents and purposes. A number of outstanding questions remain. Both in the Committee on Governmental Affairs where I serve and on the Senate floor, we have had a healthy debate over the details of how the transition to a new Department of Homeland Security should work. I know some of my colleagues are uncomfortable with what we have. I have a few concerns of my own.

That being said, I think it is important now that we put aside our disagreements and do what we need to do to enable this Department to do what it needs to do, to protect American lives.

Let me take a few minutes to discuss a couple of the issues I hope Governor Ridge will address early on during his tenure as Secretary of this Department.

First, let me touch on the subject of rail security. Now that the Transportation Security Administration has for the most part achieved the goals we set for them, it is time for them and for the Department of Homeland Security to focus on other modes that have received less attention, especially rail. As I said before, our failure more than a year after September 11 to act to improve the security of our rail infrastructure is an Achilles' heel in our Nation's effort to secure our total transportation system.

In New York City today, hundreds of thousands of people on their way to work pass through tunnels that are badly lit, poorly ventilated, and from which escape is very difficult. In fact, there is even a rail tunnel that goes under the Supreme Court and congressional offices just a couple of hundred yards from where we are gathered this evening. Every day thousands of people pass through that tunnel under this Capitol on their way to work or to home.

Passenger safety demands a real investment, but to ask Amtrak to do more with respect to security without providing more resources is, in my view, an unfunded mandate, not a solution. I thank Governor Ridge for understanding the importance of improving rail security, not just for passenger rail but for freight rail as well.

I also thank Governor Ridge for acknowledging at our hearing last week that Amtrak is likely to need some additional financial assistance,

if it is expected to make the security enhancements that need to be made.

Let me also touch on the matter of first responders. States and localities are in desperate need of additional new resources to help prepare their police, their fire, and emergency personnel for any future terrorist attacks. At the same time, most State and local governments are suffering through extraordinary fiscal crises that are forcing some to raise taxes or cut services. We see that in Delaware, in Tennessee, and a host of other States as well.

I am disappointed that the omnibus appropriations bill on the floor this evening and today and again tomorrow probably does not provide State and localities with the level of first responder aid that they need. In the future, I hope Governor Ridge, soon to be Secretary Ridge, and our colleagues in Congress and the President will heed the calls from back home for more first responder aid.

I also hope Governor Ridge works quickly in the coming weeks to set up a communications link between the new Department and first responders so their needs can be heard and information on what they need to do to protect their communities makes its way down to them.

When the Committee on Governmental Affairs first marked up the Homeland Security Act and again when a modified version of the bill reached the floor, Senators COLLINS and FEINGOLD and I

offered an amendment to create an office of State and local coordination within the new Department. That would place a homeland security liaison office within each State. Our language, unfortunately, was not included in the final bill, but I do hope Governor Ridge will consider setting up something like what we recommended once this new Department is in place and he and his employees have gotten their sea legs.

I want to close with some comments on relations with employees. A matter that held up final passage of this legislation when we created the new Department last month was really relations with employees, what kinds of rights they have under the collective bargaining laws and under the merit rules of the civil service rules of our country.

Recently, ADM James Loy, head of the Transportation Security Administration—I am told a very able person—used the authority Congress granted him under the airline security legislation we passed after September 11 to forbid airport screeners from joining unions. He cited his view that the screeners perform sensitive national security work as the reason for his decision.

The admiral's decision may or may not have been the right one. Whether it was or not, it has not done much to improve relations between the administration and thousands of unionized employees who are being transferred to this new Department, who perform work just as sensitive as—or in some cases even more

sensitive than—that performed by the screeners.

As he works with the Office of Personnel Management to develop a human resources management system for this new Department, I urge Governor Ridge to work swiftly to repair the strained relationship between the administration and the public employees' union. He will benefit by doing that, the employees of that Department will benefit, and I believe our Nation will, too.